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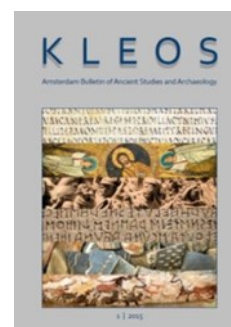
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# The rise of urbanism in Early Europe: A dialogue – Part 2: Response

MANUEL FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZ

## URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE HALLSTATT PERIOD: A COMPARATIVE VIEW

The genesis of large fortified central places is one of the most important phenomena in Later Prehistoric Europe. In temperate Western Europe, the origins of urbanism have long been identified with the emergence of the *oppida* of the second and first centuries BC, considered to be the 'earliest cities north of the Alps'.<sup>1</sup> However, large-scale research projects carried out over recent years have started to challenge this long-established view, to the point that nowadays it is possible to assert that the term 'urban' already applies to some of the so-called *Fürstensitze* or 'princely sites' of the Late Hallstatt and Early La Tène periods, i.e. around 400 years before the Late La Tène *oppida*.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of my 2013 lecture in Amsterdam was to present and develop these new insights, which continue to constitute one of my central research interests.<sup>3</sup> Studying cities in a long-term and cross-cultural perspective links the past with the present, allowing a better understanding of one of the most important developments in human history.<sup>4</sup> In what follows I will present some reflections that complement the comments made by Karin Scharringhausen in her review.

The 'classic' model of the Late Hallstatt *Fürstensitze* was presented by the Tübingen professor, Wolfgang Kimmig, in 1969. It was based primarily on the results of the excavations at the Heuneburg. He defined the discovered sites as political and administrative centres with a separate fortified central area on an elevated site. There were finds of objects from the Mediterranean, and sumptuous burials in the surrounding area. For a long time this picture remained the standard model in Central European scholarship. Authors such as W. Kimmig, E. Sangmeister and H. Zürn reconstructed a vertical stratification of society in Württemberg with three or four layers. Analogous to medieval feudal society or the aristocracy of the Early Archaic period, the richest burials were attributed to a ruling or aristocratic stratum which was proposed to stand at the top of a social pyramid. The middle of the pyramid consisted of a more or less wealthy class of persons who were free. Opinions varied as to whether the poor at the bottom were free men, or serfs.

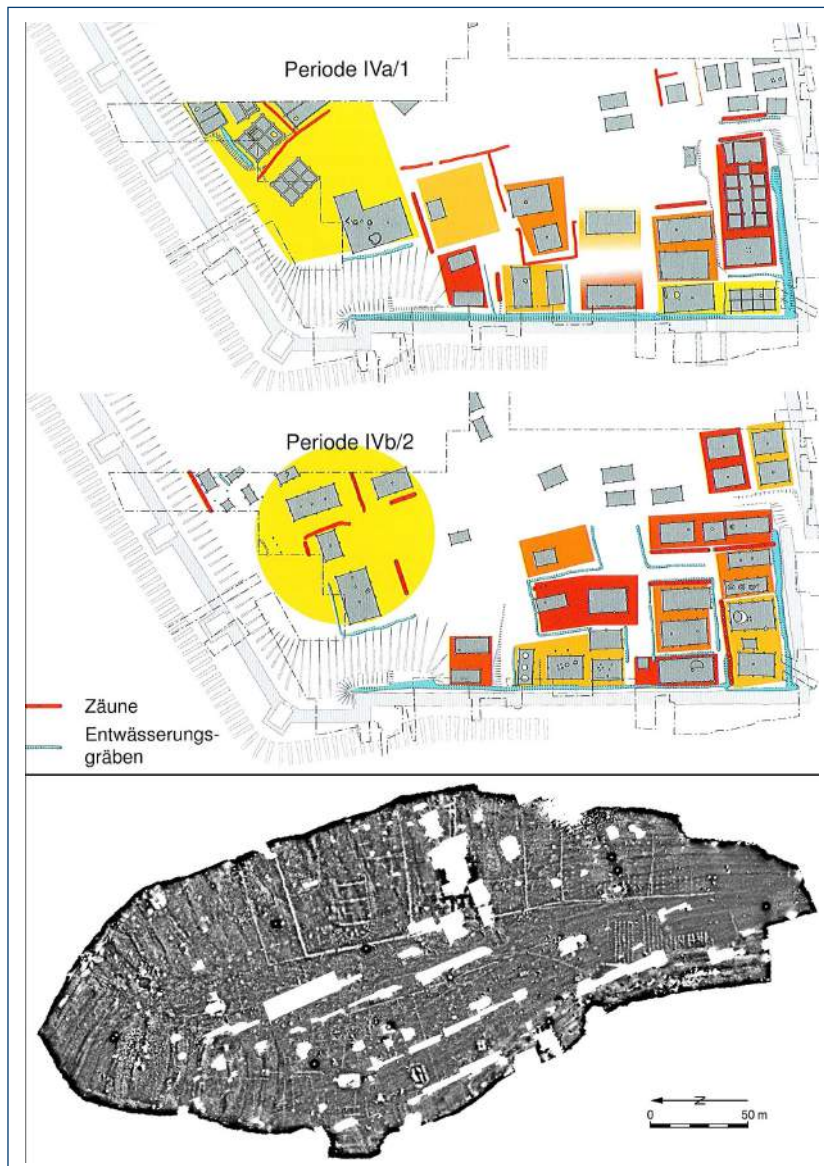
However, since then the results of recent years have led to the conclusion that the settlements that are described as *Fürstensitze* are in

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fact structurally much more complicated. They did not constitute in anyway a unified group of settlements.<sup>5</sup> They were rather centres of power that often differed significantly from each other concerning the date of their establishment, their architecture and their function as a central place. Common to almost all of them is the fact that they were inhabited for a relatively short period that only spanned a few generations, mostly for 100-200 years. Given these new results, it seems appropriate to apply the term 'town' to at least some of these centres of power such as the Heuneburg during the mudbrick wall period, or Bourges (Figure 1).



**Figure 1**

*Two examples of regular settlement layouts as evidence for town planning in the Late Hallstatt period.*

*Top: Heuneburg, plans of the settlement during the mudbrick wall phase.*

*Bottom: Mont Lassois, geomagnetic plan of the plateaus*

*(after Krausse et al. 2012).*

But other central places like the Glauberg these seem to have been enormous assembly places, refuges or cult sites rather than 'towns'. Reflecting on the diverse nature of the concept of Early Iron Age urbanism Michael E. Smith has recently stated:

"From one perspective, the question of whether the Heuneburg is classified as an urban settlement is not important. For our understanding of

that site, it is far more important to describe and explain the particular manifestations of Iron Age life and society than to classify the settlement [...] But from the broader perspective of comparative urbanism, re-classifying the Heuneburg as an urban settlement has two big advantages. First, it allows data from that site – and other Early Iron Age sites – to contribute to discussions of the nature of urbanism around the world. Comparative urban scholars can add another case – a unique and fascinating case – to our sample of early urban societies. Second, archaeologists who work at the Heuneburg can draw on the concepts and insights of comparative urban studies to add richness to their reconstructions of life, society, and change at the Heuneburg”.<sup>6</sup>

### **‘TRIANGULAR’ SOCIETIES AND THEIR ALTERNATIVES**

Apart from the mudbrick wall, in the case of the Heuneburg, evidence of Mediterranean contact and influence is minimal until the restructuring that took place after the big fire of around 540 BC.<sup>7</sup> Thus, trade with the Mediterranean was not the main drive of cultural change, but rather a consequence of population growth and increasing internal inequalities. In other words: even if the genesis of the *Fürstensitze* cannot be analysed completely independent of the simultaneous processes of urbanisation in the Mediterranean, it will have been above all indigenous factors that were responsible for their foundation. Rich burials of the phase Hallstatt C in Germany, such as Gomadingen on the Swabian Alb or the Prunkbestattung from Frankfurt-Oberad, bear witness to the fact that the increase in social hierarchisation and the development of powerful local elites had begun several decades before the arrival of the Greek colonists in the South of France and the foundation of Massalia (Marseille) soon before 600 BC, and so were primarily of an indigenous nature.

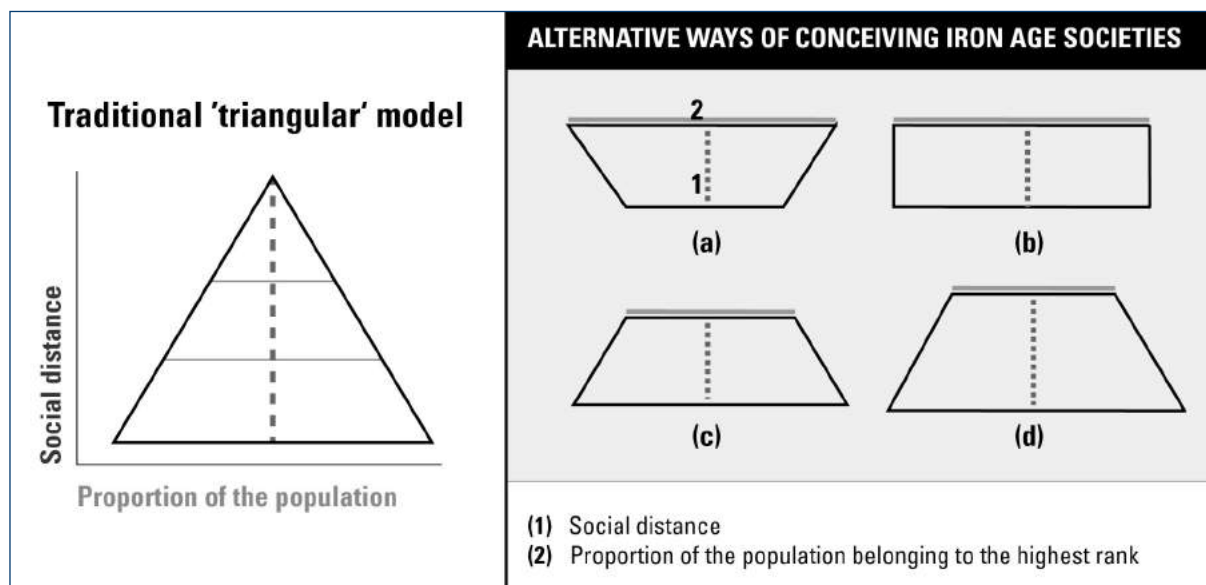
Analysis of the vegetational history indicates that in the sixth century BC for the first time there was dense settlement in the highland regions north of the Alps, areas with relatively poor climatic and agricultural conditions. This process of settling new land must have been immediately preceded by a period of increase in population.<sup>8</sup> We can assume that apart from technical innovations such as iron production and politico-organisational improvements, a period of climatically favourable conditions in the late seventh and sixth centuries BC also led to a growth in population and the settlement of new areas. These factors – population growth and an increase in available arable land and other economic resources – formed the real basis of the wealth of the social elite that is so impressively visible to us in the form of the so-called ‘princely graves’ (*Fürstengräber*). It is probable that the political and social upper class played a decisive role in the process of centralisation, because without suitable social conditions to guarantee exchange, trade and a minimum degree of social stability, it is hard to imagine the extent of growth and centralisation visible in the archaeological record.

In fact, Late Hallstatt communities – or at least a significant number of

them – constitute a good example of the social ‘triangular’ model described by Jeremy D. Hill in 2011.<sup>9</sup> Two main characteristics of Hill’s model are: a significant social distance between the members of Iron Age societies, and very few individuals occupying the highest level, whether they are referred to as chiefs, elites or aristocracy. However, archaeological evidence reveals very varied patterns of societies during the First Millennium BC in Europe, from those that display marked signs of social hierarchy, such as the communities of the so-called Late Hallstatt ‘princely seats’, to others such as those of the Iron Age Sorian hillforts in Central Spain where social differentiation was much less pronounced.<sup>10</sup> Regional differences, synchronic and diachronic, need to be recognised and evaluated, since different types of communities with a variety of social configurations, settlement and burial patterns, ideologies, etc. would have coexisted and interacted (Figure 2). There was no uniform Iron Age society, but several Iron Age societies. The task is therefore to reconsider Protohistoric societies from the perspective of diversity, but at the same time being aware of the danger of replacing one monolithic model of ‘triangular’ hierarchical warrior societies with another, which is equally simplistic and static, in which there was little or no social differentiation before ‘Romanization’.

**Figure 2**

*Traditional ‘triangular’ model of social organisation and alternative ways of conceiving Iron Age societies (created by author adapted from Hill 2011, Fig. 10.1).*



#### CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONTESTED POWER

It is important to stress that the early process of centralisation and urbanisation that led to the development of the *Fürstensitze* was followed by a phase of decentralisation that set in at different times in different areas. In fact, if we take a broader look we can assert that there was no continual evolutionary development on a European scale from simple to more complex forms of settlements and socio-political organisation during the Iron Age, but rather multi-layered, changing and dynamic cycles of centralisation and decentralisation.<sup>11</sup> Very generally, and still in peril of



over-simplification, it is possible to establish the following sequence in the area immediately north of the Alps:

- 1 a first phase of centralisation occurred in the *Fürstensitze* of the sixth and fifth centuries BC;
- 2 followed by a phase of decentralisation, which largely coincided with the stage referred to as the 'Celtic migrations';
- 3 and a new phase of centralisation that would lead to the development of large unenclosed centres and of the fortified *oppida* of the second and first centuries BC.

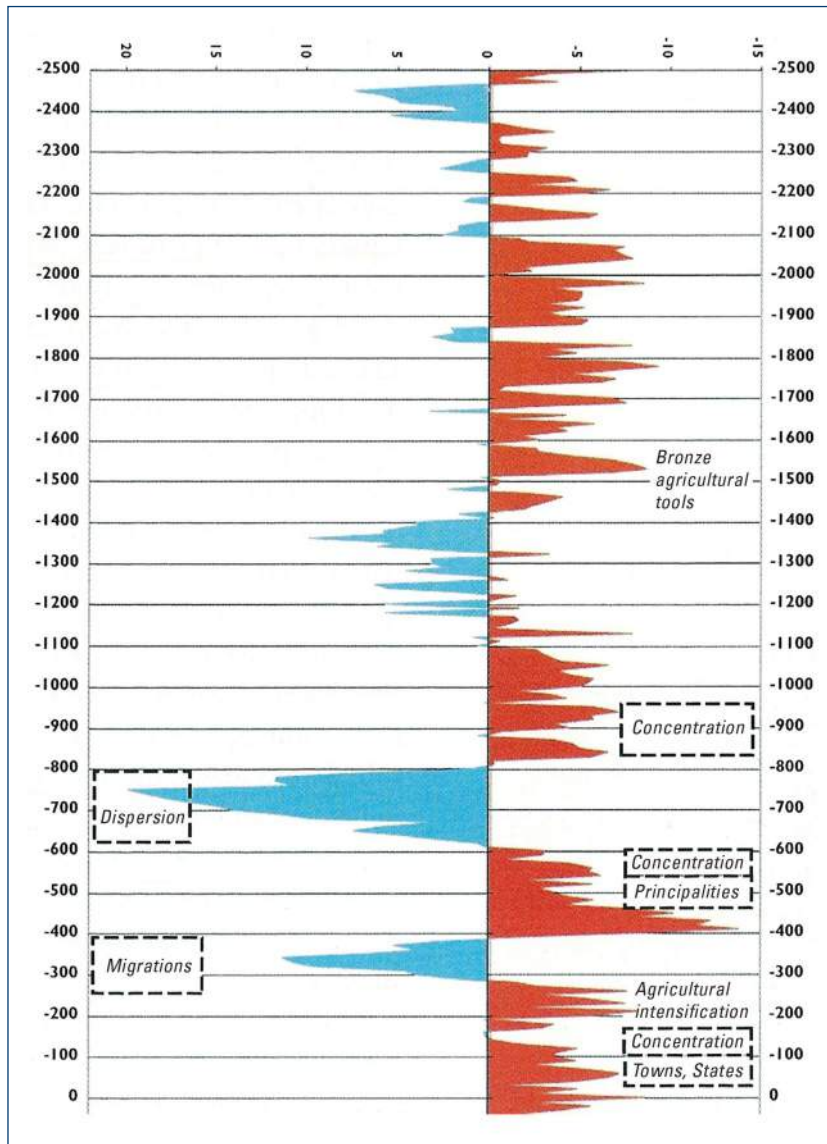
This sequence is in marked contrast with the developments that can be observed in wide areas of the Mediterranean world, where many major settlements show a continual, relatively gradual development from the Early Iron Age to Roman times, and sometimes even up to the present day.<sup>12</sup>

The reasons for these structural shifts and changes in the landscape of power are still unclear. But it can be assumed that the changes did not always take place peacefully. For example, at Mont Lassois the heads of two statues at the sanctuary of 'Les Herbues', situated in front of the hilltop, were broken off. Apparently, this took place towards the end of the Hallstatt period. Probably at the end of Period 1 the fate of the Heuneburg was sealed by a catastrophic fire that almost completely destroyed the fortification and the buildings within the acropolis. The fact that the destruction level was relatively full of finds goes against the idea that the abandonment of the site was planned. It would seem that soon after 400 BC nearly all of the early centres of power had come to an end. It is likely that this change was linked to the social processes that were involved in the migration of 'Celtic' groups to Italy and as far as the Balkans that are mentioned by historical sources.

The circumstances leading to the decline of the *Fürstensitze* most likely operated at different levels, so that explanations based on a single cause are insufficient. But there are indications that one of the catalysts was climate change: analysis of cores from the Greenland icecap indicate that as early as the first half of the fifth century BC temperatures dropped in the entire northern hemisphere, followed by a rapid environmental degradation around 400 BC.<sup>13</sup> The cooler climate certainly will not have made the areas settled in Southern Germany or Eastern France uninhabitable, but it could have led to poor harvests in the areas which had been colonised just a few generations earlier.<sup>14</sup> This may have led to famine and migration. At the macroperspective level, the main climatic periods of the first millennium BC do indeed correspond with the most important stages of the processes of centralisation and decentralisation that took place north of the Alps.<sup>15</sup> The processes that led to the establishment of the Late Hallstatt *Fürstensitze* or the Late Latène *oppida* coincide with climatically warmer periods, while the Celtic migrations of the fourth century BC took place during a colder period (Figure 3). However, if we look at the situation in detail, then numerous nuances and exceptions must be



taken into account. Thus the environmental indicators do not explain so clearly why some centres of power such as Heuneburg or Mont Lassois were abandoned half-way around the fifth century BC, while others such as Breisacher Münsterberg or Hohenasperg continued to function during the second half of the same century.



**Figure 3**

*Evolution of solar activity between ca. 2500 BC and the beginning of the Common Era, with cold periods marked in blue and warmer periods in red (after Brun/Ruby 2008).*

An explanatory model that should be considered, and is perhaps complementary to the climate change model, concerns the role of migration as a mechanism for regulating power relationships. The emigration of part of the population can indeed be a means of reducing social inequalities. As a whole series of historical and ethnological studies demonstrate, during the course of history societies have employed various strategies in order to counter the development of state organisations. The separation of part of the group is a mechanism that is often used in this process, and in the case of the early Celtic societies could also have served as a reaction to the increasing social inequalities of the sixth and fifth centuries BC north of the Alps.<sup>16</sup>

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## NOTES

- 1 To paraphrase the title of the famous book by Prof. John Collis, 1984: *Oppida: earliest towns north of the Alps*.
- 2 Krausse 2008, 2010; Sievers and Schönfelder 2012.
- 3 See e.g. Fernández-Götz 2014b; Fernández-Götz and Krausse 2013; Fernández-Götz and Krausse forthcoming; Fernández-Götz et al. 2014.
- 4 Clark 2013; Smith 2012.
- 5 Krausse 2008; 2010.
- 6 Smith 2014, v.
- 7 Krausse et al. 2015.
- 8 Fernández-Götz 2014a; Krausse 2006.

- 9 Hill 2011.
- 10 Ruiz Zapatero/Fernández-Götz 2009.
- 11 Fernández-Götz 2014a; Salaç 2012.
- 12 Garcia 2013.
- 13 Maise 1998; Sirocko 2009.
- 14 These areas were less favourable for settlement, but cultivated due to population growth.
- 15 Brun/Ruby 2008, 55; Fernández-Götz 2014a, 134-137.
- 16 Demoule 1999; Fernández-Götz 2014a, 138-141.